



**RADM Peter L. Andrus, MC, USNR**  
National VP for Health Programs

As a group, NRA members are likely to experience international travel opportunities and challenges, whether in Selected Reserve, retired, or some other status. The reasons for travel are various – Naval duty, business, or leisure – as are the duration and destinations. Likewise, travel may be frequent or occasional. In any event, preparation for travel and the medical challenges that it may present is always appropriate and essential. In this and next month's articles, we will review some of the essential subjects to address in order to ensure that travel goes off without a hitch related to injury or illness.

Prevention always trumps cure, so we will review immunizations as well as provide guidance about a travel first aid kit and medical history items to have available while in travel status. In addition, we'll touch base on some of the common medical issues that may arise while in travel status and how to be prepared for them.

A number of studies and surveys have shown that between a quarter to a half of all travelers are likely to encounter a medical problem while away from home. This can put a definite crimp in one's enjoyment of a leisure trip, as well as interfere with business obligations or compromise mission accomplishment in a military situation. Trauma, respiratory, or skin problems and traveler's diarrhea are commonly encountered conditions. As at home, trauma is the most common cause of death in younger adults; and cardiovascular disease holds that position for older adults. Among infectious diseases, malaria tops the list of significant health risks, while HIV and SARS have had more recent media attention.

### Immunizations

Routine immunizations include those which most of us had in childhood:

## Travel Medicine - Part I

diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, measles, mumps, and rubella. In addition, adult booster doses are required for tetanus and diphtheria every ten years. Influenza (annually) and pneumococcal (for those over 60) vaccines might also be considered routine vaccines for adults at the present time.

The only currently required immunization for international travel is yellow fever vaccine, which applies for entry into certain South American and African countries. Recommended immunizations will vary with the destination and situation of the individual traveler. Among those most commonly applicable are hepatitis A and hepatitis B, Japanese B encephalitis, meningococcal, rabies, and typhoid vaccines. Other immunizations with specific military applicability include anthrax and smallpox. Cholera and plague vaccines are available but have low efficacy and are rarely pertinent.

The traveler's military or civilian health care provider can review current immunization status and make recommendations for any additional shots that may be appropriate, based either on military instructions or civilian guidance that is readily available from a variety of sources. Useful Web sites in this regard include the CDC (<<http://www.cdc.gov/travel>> and <<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/yb/index.htm>>) and WHO (<<http://www.who.int/ith/index.html>>). The World Health Organization's International Certificates of Vaccination (yellow card) should be completed, with all past and current immunizations recorded, and carried for international trips. It is wise to keep a backup copy of this information in a safe location at home in the event of loss of the original record. Since vaccine acquisition and administration may require some time, one should begin the process of updating shots several weeks before an intended international trip to ensure adequate time to complete all requirements.

### Medical Records and Travel First Aid Kit

Selected Reservists traveling on orders are likely to be carrying their health records either individually or as part of their units' gear. If so, complete information on health matters should be included. For other

travelers, it is useful to carry a summary of their personal medical history including past and current medical diagnoses of importance, past surgical procedures, allergies, and current medications, with complete information on dosages taken. Such information can be committed to a single page of paper and carried in personal luggage, with a duplicate carried on one's person. An allergy, diagnosis, or medication alert bracelet or dog tag may also be helpful. Any prescription or over-the-counter medications should also be taken in adequate supply, with an allowance for possible delays. A legal prescription for any doctor-ordered medication is an important safeguard against delays or difficulty clearing customs in countries whose regulations may vary from our own. For those deploying for extended periods, unit medical personnel can provide advice on the necessary amount of medications to be carried in accordance with current official guidance.

A personal first aid kit is an essential item to include in one's gear. The size, amount, and completeness of such a kit will vary from a very simple one to one that is much more comprehensive, depending on the length and circumstances of a given travel scenario. Supplies and equipment to be considered would include bandage materials, tape, scissors, tweezers, and a thermometer. Over-the-counter medicines might include: topical antibiotic and steroid creams and sunscreen for skin conditions; decongestants, antihistamines, and cough remedies for respiratory symptoms; medication to relieve either constipation or diarrhea; pain relievers; and special purpose medications such as those for motion or altitude sickness. As noted above, prescription medications, including anti-malarial prophylaxis medications where applicable, are also essential.

In this first installment on travel medicine, we have reviewed immunizations, health records, and a travel first aid kit. Next month, we will review some specific travel-related health problems and the necessary steps to manage them.

*(To be continued in next month's issue of NRA News. –April)*